



NEWS BRIEFS

Major Crop Seeds Are “Pervasively Contaminated” with Genetically Engineered Content, Study Finds

Commercial seeds of several major U.S. crops are “pervasively contaminated” with DNA from engineered varieties of those crops, concludes a study by the Union of Concerned Scientists (*New York Times*, Feb. 24; *New Scientist*, Feb. 28). Commercial testing of 18 non-transgenic varieties (6 each of corn, soybean, and canola) showed low foreign DNA levels, from 0.05 to 1 percent, in at least half of the corn and soybean varieties and at least 83 percent of the canola tested. The results suggest “an easy path for the movement of transgenes into the seed supply—one impeded little by current regulations or the standard confinement procedures in commodity crop seed production,” the report states. It urges wider recognition of the health, safety, and economic risks revealed by the pilot study, and recommends actions including a full-scale USDA study of seed contamination, stronger federal rules to keep transgenic pharm and industrial crops out of the seed supply, and creation of a crop seed reservoir for non-engineered varieties. “Gone to Seed: Transgenic Contaminants in the Traditional Seed Supply” is online at www.ucsusa.org; a print copy is \$18, phone (617) 547-5552.

Governments Agree on Labeling Rules Governing International Trade of GM Crops

New labeling rules for cross-border trade of genetically modified crops were adopted last month by the 87 member nations of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, an international treaty intended to inform importing nations about their potential hazards. The new system requires bulk shipments of GM crops to be identified and labeled with the phrase “may contain LMOs” (or living modified organisms), with records identifying importers and exporters, emergency contacts, and storage and handling needs (CBD News, Feb. 27, www.biodiv.org). The conference agreed also to negotiate liability rules allowing compensation from GM exporters for environmental or health damages. The labeling requirements are opposed by the U.S., which has not endorsed the treaty or the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity that oversees it (AP Worldstream, Feb. 27). The impacts on U.S. exports will depend on several key issues still to be resolved, including the threshold of modified material that crops may contain and still be regarded as “GM-free” (Greenwire, March 1).

Designing Year-Round Grazing Systems for Pasture-Raised Appalachian Beef Is Research Focus

Designing year-round grazing systems for pasture-raised beef in the Appalachian Mountains and southeastern states is the focus of a broadly collaborative project involving scientists from USDA’s Agricultural Research Service and their academic colleagues in three states. The project aims to produce high-quality grass-fed beef intended for the ‘natural beef’ market, to benefit small family farms that graze livestock but have difficulty competing with feedlot beef from larger, highly mechanized operations. Grass-fed herds from north to south throughout the region would “graze Appalachian pastures intensively and be rotated from paddock to paddock” just as Argentine cattle graze the South American pampas (*Agricultural Research*, Feb. 2004, www.ars.usda.gov/is/AR/archive/feb04). More information is online from the Appalachian Farming Systems Research Center, www.arserrc.gov/beckley/beefsys.htm, or from William Clapham, ARS, (304) 256-2972.

Pesticide–Predator Combination Is More Deadly to Frogs, Pioneering Research Finds

Low concentrations of a globally common pesticide are more deadly to certain frogs when tested in combination with a natural predator, according to pioneering research that more closely mimics nature, as compared to standard toxicity testing under “highly artificial” conditions. Investigators exposed tadpoles of 6 amphibian species to the insecticide carbaryl (sold as Sevin) using low concentrations likely to occur in ponds and wetlands after nearby fields are sprayed. When carbaryl exposure was combined with caged predatory newts, the combination was up to 8 times more deadly to green frogs and 46 times more deadly to bullfrogs than the pesticide or predator alone. The study, published in *Ecological Applications* (Dec. 2003), “adds to the growing body of research on multiple stressors in frogs that suggests that the U.S. EPA’s standards for testing pesticide toxicity are inadequate” (*Environmental Science & Technology*, Jan. 29, 2004). For more information, contact author Rick Relyea, University of Pittsburgh, email relyea+@pitt.edu.

**Endocrine-Disrupting
Pesticides Can Block
Nitrogen Fixation, Slow
Plant Growth**

Some of the same pesticides and other estrogen-like chemicals that can harm wildlife also disrupt the 'endocrine signaling' that enables the crucial symbiotic relationship between legumes and nitrogen-fixing bacteria. Jennifer Fox (University of Oregon) and colleagues tested 100 known estrogen disrupters (including organochlorine pesticides commonly found in soils) for their effects on alfalfa and found that half inhibited nodule formation to varying degree. According to a news summary in *Science* (Feb. 13), the worst offenders, pentachlorophenol and methyl-parathion, reduced activity of a key chemical messenger by 90 percent, which blocked nodule formation and slowed plant growth. The results suggest that endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) can rob leguminous plants of key nutrients, causing them to 'mine' the soil for nitrogen compounds as other plants do. Reporting in two articles in *Environmental Health Perspectives* (Jan. 29), the authors found "bacterial-plant symbiosis to be an unexpected target of EDCs" and propose that "other unexpected non-target species" may likewise be vulnerable to EDCs in the environment.

**Federal Jury Sides with
Cattlemen, Finds Tyson
Foods Illegally Fixed
Cattle Prices**

A federal jury in Alabama last month recommended an award of \$1.28 billion to cattle producers, after siding with a group of six cattlemen who claimed that Tyson Foods Inc., the largest U.S. beef processor, had illegally manipulated cattle prices in violation of the Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921 (*Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, Feb. 18). "The jury's decision could be a first step toward reversing the kind of power big businesses have gained as consolidation has swept through the cattle and beef industries over the past two decades," the *Post* wrote. The 8-year-long class-action antitrust case alleged that Tyson (formerly IBP Inc.) controlled large volumes of captive-cattle supplies, obtained through long-term contracts with a select group of producers, allowing the firm to illegally depress the cash-price market for an estimated 30,000 producers between 1994 and 2002. While the presiding judge has yet to accept the jury verdict, the cattlemen's lead attorney plans to seek a court ruling forcing Tyson to buy 90 percent of its cattle on the open market, up from about 50 percent currently (*Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 19).

**Coalition Mobilizes to
Defend Nebraska's
Anti-Corporate Farming
Law**

A coalition of 21 groups joined as 'Friends of the Constitution' has mobilized to defend Initiative 300, Nebraska's 20-year-old law banning corporate farming, against legislation that would authorize a study of the law's impact (AP, Feb. 17, Feb. 23; *Omaha World Herald*, Feb. 18). Coalition members fear the review is a disguised attempt to weaken I-300; they say the state continues to benefit from increased competition fostered by the corporate farming ban, and a legislative hearing held last month showed "overwhelming support" among the state's farmers and ranchers for keeping I-300 intact. Governor Mike Johanns called for the review last year after a state Department of Agriculture report concluded that Nebraska "needs to become and to promote itself as a corporate-friendly state..." According to the Center for Rural Affairs, a coalition member, I-300 helps to ensure a diverse crop and livestock economy in the state, supports "the easy transition of beginning farmers and ranchers into production agriculture," and protects Nebraskans from "irresponsible environmental practices and negligent financial schemes" (www.cfra.org/I300.htm). For more information, contact Jon Bailey, jonb@cfra.org, or visit the coalition website, www.i300.org.

**Bush Administration
Misuses Science to
Serve Political Agenda,
Leading Scientists Warn**

The Bush Administration has systematically misused scientific analyses from federal agencies to serve its political agenda, according to a strong critique issued last month by 60 leading scientists, including 20 Nobel laureates and several science advisors to past presidents. The group's February 18 statement on "Restoring Scientific Integrity" was accompanied by a report from the Union of Concerned Scientists that details cases of suppression, censorship, stacking scientific panels with industry representatives, and similar actions that undermine the independent advisory process. Evidence cited by the 37-page report covers a range of issues affecting public health, the environment, and national security, and includes distorting and suppressing EPA data on global climate change; stifling USDA findings on the potential hazards of airborne bacteria from confined livestock wastes; manipulating EPA data on mercury-related health risks from power plant emissions; and tampering with the integrity of an expert panel charged with setting a lead poisoning threshold for children. The report, "Scientific Integrity in Policymaking: An Investigation into the Bush Administration's Misuse of Science," and the scientists' statement and list of signatories, are online at www.ucsusa.org/global_environment/rsi, or contact UCS, email ucs@ucsusa.org.

RESOURCES

■ **Alternative Food Initiatives in California: Local Efforts Address Systemic Issues** (12 pgs, research brief #3), http://zzyx.ucsc.edu/casfs/about/Brief3_AFI.pdf, or contact Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, Univ. of California, (831) 459-3240; martha@zzyx.ucsc.edu.

■ **Batteries Not Included: Organic Farming and Animal Welfare** (90 pgs), linked from www.soilassociation.org/web/sa/saweb.nsf/shop/index.html; print copy is £12 plus S/H from Soil Association (UK), sass@soilassociation.org.

■ **Cover Crops on the Intensive Market Farm** (24 pgs), www.wisc.edu/cias/pubs/cvrcrop.pdf, and **Becoming a Certified Organic Fresh Market Grower** (12 pgs), www.wisc.edu/cias/pubs/certorg.pdf; or contact Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, Univ. of Wisconsin, (608) 262-5200.

■ **Farm-to-Cafeteria Connections: Marketing Opportunities for Small Farms in Washington State** (revised Jan. 2004, 97 pgs), <http://agr.wa.gov/Marketing/SmallFarm/>; print copy is free from Small Farm and Direct Marketing Program, Washington State Dept. of Agriculture, (360) 902-2057; ksanger@agr.was.gov.

■ **Farmstop.com**, national agritourism website of U.S. and Canadian farms, ranches, wineries, farmers' markets, and other resources, www.farmstop.com; or contact Jane Eckert, (314) 862-6288; jane@eckertagrimarketing.com.

■ **Fresh Market Vegetable Resource CD** with production and marketing

information, from Univ. of Wisconsin Extension and UW-Madison's Nutrient & Pest Management Program, and Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, is \$5 from CIAS, (608) 262-5200, phaza@wisc.edu.

■ **A Guide to Illinois Laws Governing Direct Farm Marketing for Farmers and Other Food Entrepreneurs**, 16-pg pamphlet, is \$7.50 from Illinois Stewardship Alliance, PO Box 648, Rochester, IL 62563; (217) 498-9707.

■ **2003 High Tunnel Production Manual** (152+ pgs), <http://plasticulture.cas.psu.edu/manual.htm> (or \$25 for print copy), and **2003 Crop Review** (26 pgs) is \$3, from Bill Lamont, Dept. of Horticulture/Center for Plasticulture, 206 Tyson Bldg., Penn State University, University Park, PA 16802; (814) 865-7118; wlamont@psu.edu.

■ **An Interactive Approach to Policy Impact Assessment for Organic Farms in Europe** (200 pgs), Vol. 10 in series "Organic Farming in Europe: Economics and Policy," 26 Euro from Univ. of Hohenheim, Institute of Farm Economics (Stuttgart, Germany); ofeurope@uni-hohenheim.de; or www.uni-hohenheim.de/~i410a/ofeurope/.

■ **Managing Soil Organic Matter: The Key to Air and Water Quality**, 4-pg technical note from USDA-NRCS, http://soils.usda.gov/sqi/files/Managing_SOM.pdf; print copy is free from Landcare, 1-888-526-3227; landcare@swcs.org.

■ **Organic Livestock Research Survey**, 9-pg report on research priorities for U.S. organic livestock industry,

www.misa.umn.edu/main.html; print copy is free from Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, 1-800-909-6472; or author Jim Riddle, jriddle@hbci.com.

■ **The Persistence of Pesticide Dependence: A Review of World Bank Projects and Their Compliance with the World Bank's Pest Management Policy, 1999-2003** (36 pgs) is available from World Bank Accountability Project, Pesticide Action Network North America, (415) 981-1771; travis@panna.org; summary article is online, www.panna.org/campaigns/worldBank.html.

■ **Prairie Writers Circle archive**, collection of essays (2002-2003) from Kansas and national writers, from The Land Institute, linked from www.landinstitute.org; or contact (785) 823-5376; theland@landinstitute.org.

■ **Renewable energy fact sheets** on wind, solar, and biomass energy in agriculture, plus information on markets and state-level support, are available from Clean Energy Program, Union of Concerned Scientists, Two Brattle Square, Cambridge, MA 02238; (617) 547-5552.

■ **Taking the First Step: Farm and Ranch Alternative Enterprise and Agritourism Resource Evaluation Guide** (53 pgs), from Southern Maryland Resource Conservation Board, <http://nrsc.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise/>; for free print copy, contact Southern Maryland RC&D, 303 Post Office Rd., #B4A, Waldorf, MD 20602; somdred@verizon.net; or NRCS-RESS Division, (202) 720-2307.

CALENDAR

March 2004

31: Proposal submission deadline for "Farming on the Edge: Meeting the Challenge," American Farmland Trust's 2004 national conference, November 15-17, 2004, in Lexington, KY; contact AFT, (413) 596-9330; info@farmland.org.

31: Nomination deadline for "2004 Spencer Award" recognizing significant contributions towards advancing ecological and economic stability of mainstream family farms in Iowa; contact Laura Miller, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, (515) 294-5272; www.leopold.iastate.edu/spencer/spencer.html.

31: Abstract submission deadline for "Innovative Uses of Biosolids and Animal Manure," Fifth Joint Symposium held by Water Environment Federation and U.S. EPA Region 5, emphasizing recycling, value-added opportunities, and systems approaches, June 30-July 2, 2004, in Chicago, IL; contact WEF, Govt. Affairs Dept., edemichele@wef.org; www.wef.org/pdf/Innovative_form.pdf.

April 2004

1: Abstract submission deadline for presentations to Fourth Eastern Native Grass Symposium highlighting native grass uses, adaptation, and importance, October 3-5, 2004, in Lexington, KY; contact Thomas Barnes, tbarnes@uky.edu; www.uky.edu/Agriculture/Forestry/grass_symposium/.

2-4: "Unite for Change: New Approaches to Pesticides and Environmental Health," 22nd National Pesticide Forum sponsored by Pesticide Action Network North America, Beyond Pesticides, and Californians for Pesticide Reform, in Berkeley, CA; contact John Kepner, (202) 543-5450; www.beyondpesticides.org/forum.

15-17: "Food Sovereignty, Conservation & Social Movements for Sustainable Agriculture in the Americas," international forum and workshop co-sponsored by Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies and others; in New Haven, CT; contact Margarita.Fernandez@Yale.edu; www.yale.edu/las/food/index.pdf.

16-17: "Growing Possibilities: Agriculture in the City," 2nd Annual Urban Agriculture Conference, in Boston, MA; contact Kristin Brennan, Food Project, (617) 442-1322 ext. 12; kbrennan@thefoodproject.org.

20 and 27, May 4 and 11: "Exploring the Small Farm Dream," 4-part course (plus Saturday field trip) on starting an agricultural business, held at Mercer County Community College, NJ; to register, (609) 586-9446, www.mccc.edu; for program details, contact Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey, (609) 737-6848; or (413) 323-4531, explorer@smallfarm.org.

25-27: "Eating as a Moral Act: Ethics and Power from Agrarianism to Consumerism," interdisciplinary symposium organized by Univ. of New Hampshire Office of Sustainability Programs, in Durham, NH; phone (603) 862-4088; www.sustainableunh.unh.edu/fas/eating_moral_act.html.

30-May 1: Organic Beekeeping Workshop, in Chestnut Ridge, NY; contact Pfeiffer Center, (845) 352-5020 ext. 20; beework@pfeiffercenter.org; www.pfeiffercenter.org/workshops/index.asp.

May 2004

3-4: "All Things Organic" Conference and Trade Show, in Chicago, IL; contact Organic Trade Association, (413) 774-7511; info@ota.com; www.ota.com.

7-9: "Grow Biointensive: Sustainable Mini-Farming Three-Day Workshop" for gardeners, farmers, and educators, in Spring Grove, PA; contact Cynthia Rasier Jeavons, Ecology Action, (707) 459-5958; www.growbiointensive.org/biointensive/Training.html.

10: Nomination deadline for 2nd Annual "Patrick Madden Award for Sustainable Agriculture" from USDA SARE program, open to farmers and ranchers in U.S. and protectorates; contact Val Berton, (301) 504-5230; vberton@sare.org; www.sare.org/madden.

15-16: 5th Annual "Heartland Celebration" of food, farming, and healthy living, in Stevinson, CA; contact Ecological Farming Association, (831) 763-2111, info@eco-farm.org.



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